

Mass Readings: September 27, 2026

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 138

Reading 1 - [Amos 6:1a, 4-7](#)

Thus says the LORD the God of hosts: Woe to the complacent in Zion! Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall! Improvising to the music of the harp, like David, they devise their own accompaniment. They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph! Therefore, now they shall be the first to go into exile, and their wanton revelry shall be done away with.

Responsorial [Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10](#) - R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!

Reading 2 - [1 Timothy 6:11-16](#)

But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate for the noble confession, to keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ that the blessed and only ruler will make manifest at the proper time, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, and whom no human being has seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

Gospel - [Luke 16:19-31](#)

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

The Declaration of Independence & The American Dream: An Incarnation of the Human Condition

To some people, the story in today's Gospel might seem more than a wee bit unfair. A quick read and little reflection could lead to thinking that an apparently successful and faithful man finds himself in a place of torment after his death and that a beggar at the gate, who may have never done a day's work in his life, also dies and ends up in Abraham's bosom, leading to confusion about the mercy and justice of God. But the basic message is received: be nice to the poor when they're literally on your doorstep. There is so much more to this story. To understand it properly, alongside the words of the prophet Amos in the 1st reading, we'll need to consider it in light of the 10 commandments and common Jewish teaching, which the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking, would have readily understood. It will also involve considering our own understanding of what it means to be rich and our dispositions toward the materially poor and others who are marginalized, using the advice of St. Paul to the Bishop Timothy in the 2nd reading.

The readings today are thematically united and together provide both a corrective caution and a better path forward. I'd like to explore this as viewed alongside the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the subsequent concept of the American Dream, as well as with consideration of our lived experience. The readings challenge us to reconsider what it truly means to live authentically human lives that, by the grace of God, overcome the pitfalls of the human condition. A condition which if allowed to be our driving force, will lead us to create cultures of death that prize ambition and individual achievement over and against the love of God and of neighbor. At its best, if the Declaration of Independence is read and the American Dream is conceived of in a communal context, we might be inspired to strive for an ideal that approximates the Universal Call to Holiness. But if these are read and conceived of in an individualistic mindset, then the natural hope they are intended to inspire will be merely an unrealistic opiate for the masses allowing for the many to be oppressed by the few and the few to suffer discouragement and a feeling of being disenfranchised, despite their efforts.

The Gospel presents a call to look beyond personal success and the pursuit of happiness as defined by individualistic material gain and consumerist mindsets, urging us instead to recognize our responsibility toward those who are marginalized and suffering at our doorstep and throughout the world, especially with regard to the blessings of God in our lives and God's will as to how they ought to be used or shared. This message invites us to reflect on how our faith and our nation's founding principles both aspire to dignity and justice for all yet can and will fall far short when authentic faith, unconditional compassion, and radical solidarity are lacking. In this way, the readings compel us to pursue a life not only of personal virtue, as St. Paul instructs Timothy, but also of active love and justice toward our neighbors, fulfilling both divine and natural laws as together we strive for excellence in achieving our greatest good.

Although not unique to our time in history but arguably more intense and pervasive due to ideological and cultural globalization facilitated in large part by the internet and especially true in the West, our 'world' praises and rewards ambitions that achieve our goals while being highly intolerant of failure and even less of mercy. This secular mindset encourages us to repress reason and acquiesce to our base passions and also serves to greatly individualize both religion and culture resulting in a society which says people deserve everything they desire and are willing to work for and approves of acquiring these in any and every way possible, to do whatever is necessary to succeed regardless of the consequences for others or the long-term consequences for all. The emphasis is counter to the teachings of faith, instead being firmly rooted in the minimizing of faith and the rejection of God in favor of the exultation of man. It is guided by a shifting morality built on the sands of relativism within the bounds of the current social contract. Our formation starts right in kindergarten with the very first school report. Our role models are the few among

us who have been manifestly exceptional in their success but nonetheless presented to us as representative of what is possible for everyone.

The above state of affairs isn't what the founding fathers of America intended. They did not imagine our pursuits to be unguided by God, even while their faith was deist in nature and their declaration more Epicurean than Christian. Optimistically we might even say that they were striving to represent everyone, the rich, the poor, the persecuted, the oppressed – fighting to establish a more just society free from tyranny. This driving cultural ethos became what we have come to know as, the 'American Dream' or as some refer to it, the 'Promise of America'. At its best, it is an ideal that offers natural hope to everyone. Although each person, exercising individual freedom defines this right to strive for a life of one's own choosing, to a degree, the common thread for everyone is that anyone with a good work ethic and the aide of good government can realize their aspirations to lift themselves upward on the socio-economic ladder, and along the way contributing to the good of all by creating something greater for themselves and others. In so believing and so doing, we are considered good citizen patriots of these United States. The right to Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are not to be denied to anyone, since in its most idealized presentation with an emphasis on an undeniable truth of faith it is claimed that, these rights are themselves unalienable as having been endowed by our creator who made us all equal and that these self-evident truths are so declared with reliance upon the protection of divine providence.

As with everything, man's inclination to love himself more than God and others has resulted in a situation where, though this was meant to inspire natural hope and to allow for the best in and of us to flourish, the many have been left to live in suffering, sickness, and various kinds of poverty – the American Nightmare. This is despite their efforts to seek the dream and the revolutionary spirit of the founding ideals that has beckoned generations of Americans, even Americans who were willing to fight and die to ensure that we are all included in its promise. Clearly, the current approach and understanding of the Declaration and the Dream, isn't working. In fact, insofar as these are not rooted in and guided by the Truths of God – the Declaration becomes a malleable philosophical ideology, and the Dream becomes impossible to achieve without culture wars, social and political tribalism, and individualistic assertion of MY rights over the rights of others.

For us Christians, often as deeply influenced with these ideas as anyone, our way of living our faith can easily slide into being individualistically self-centered. The emphasis becomes focused on personal salvation achieved by being a 'reasonably good person'. By which is meant, we can proudly say that we aren't like 'those' people whose lives are driven by the unrestrained passions. When this happens, it is seldom that anyone confesses truths such as these; "I know I'm guilty of loving myself and my stuff more than God, I know it's wrong, *but I know I'm not going to stop.*" Or "sure I cheat on my taxes, but c'mon, who does it hurt, it's the government, it's not like I'm stealing from anyone, it's MY MONEY, I earned it." The unspoken truth for the average Christian effectively results in only admitting personal disappointment, never contemplating the true nature of personal sin or the broader social consequences. This comfortable Christian disposition admits only of acceptable change and comfortable accountability that allows for some reasonable sacrifice while still being, doing, and GETTING WHAT I WANT... and sure, don't forget to put a few bucks in that red kettle at Christmas time.

If we were to base our judgements on the above image of the 'good Catholic', then there was really nothing much wrong with the rich man. All he did was to enjoy his wealth and his good food, his big house, his fashionable and expensive clothes. He did not *seem* to do any harm to the poor man. He did not drive him away or use abusive language towards him. The rich man was, in fact, quite 'charitable', some might say. This is not the picture that the Gospel today describes.

At this point we should be clear. God loves the poor, not because they are poor—where ‘poor’ means deprived of what is necessary to live a fully human life, but simply because they exist and God made them. God also loves the rich, not because they are rich, but simply because they exist and God made them. What we call the ‘social gospel’ isn’t a denunciation of material wealth. That would contradict all of scripture which teaches that all good things come from God. There is nothing inherently wrong with being rich in material goods. Indeed, that rich man in the parable and the Israelite leaders of the first reading might well have worked very hard in cooperation with God. Perhaps they were good family men who loved their wives and were good fathers to their children. Perhaps they went faithfully to the synagogue every Sabbath and observed all the regulations of the Sabbath day. Yet, as long as that poor man lay uncared for at his feet, the rich man was totally condemned. As long as those Israelites remained unconcerned about the ‘collapse of Joseph’ they would remain condemned. It isn’t about the money, it’s about the faith, from which you learn to be thankful and by which you are taught what to do with it all.

The cure for what ails us and our societies, is the same as it has ever been... Listen to Him and Do what He says. The various letters of St. Paul are great resources for understanding the application of Gospel truth to the challenges of daily life and the human condition we all must deal with on some level. Gods living Word and enfleshed as it is in Christ Jesus, is the antidote to the culture of death which necessarily results from original sin. The children of God must strive toward uncompromised, undiminished, unadulterated sanctified lives of eager and consistent response to the universal call to holiness. There is no other way for these words, *“all men are created equal... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,[and] that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”*, to be comprehensible and therefore a true guide, as explicitly derived from and rooted in Divine Truth, for the pursuit of the American Dream. No one left behind.¹

Returning to the readings and the gravity of the sins of the leaders of Jerusalem in the 1st reading and the rich man in the parable, we will see that they suffered grave consequences because they did not live according to the teaching of their faith, they did not please God because they did not ‘*keep the commandment*’, they did not ‘*lay hold of eternal life*’. St. Paul’s reference to ‘*the commandment*’ is not to imply one of them in particular but to see them all together as a whole. A whole to be understood as the Great Commandment and therefore recalling these words,

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”²

As well, the call to fidelity that follows,

“When the LORD, your God, brings you into the land which he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would give you, a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, with houses full of goods of all sorts that you did not garner, with cisterns that you did not dig, with vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant; and when, therefore, you eat and are satisfied, be careful not to forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that house of slavery. The LORD, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve,³ and by his name shall you swear. You shall not go after other gods, any of the gods of the surrounding peoples—for the LORD, your God who is in your midst, is a passionate God—lest the anger of the LORD, your God, flare up against you and he destroy you from upon the land. You shall not put the LORD, your God, to the test, as you did at Massah. But keep the commandments of the LORD, your God, and the decrees and the statutes he has commanded you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the

¹ Lk 4:18–19

² Deuteronomy 6:4-9

LORD, that it may go well with you, and you may enter in and possess the good land which the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors, driving all your enemies out of your way, as the LORD has promised.”³

As a reminder, these are the 10 Commandments:

1. I am the LORD your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD’s Day.
4. Honor your father and mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.

As we know, the 10 Commandments can be divided in two groups, according to both old and new testaments: those that have to do with loving God, and those that have to do with loving each other. Now let’s consider the nature of their guilt.

Group 1: Love of God - Faith is the theological virtue that opens us to God and enables us to keep the first three commandments. It joins us inwardly with God.

1. **Guilty** - I am the LORD your God; you shall not have strange gods before me: The Church teaches that the first commandment is the foundation of the whole moral life and establishes the proper orientation of the human person toward the ultimate end of life—God Himself. It calls every person to believe in the one true God, to love Him above all things, and to reject every form of idolatry, superstition, and false devotion.⁴ The theological virtue of Hope helps us to have and maintain the proper ordering of our priorities by enabling us to trust that God alone can fulfill the deepest needs of the human heart. The theological virtue of Charity (Love) enables us to love God “*with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*”,⁵ and place God at the center of every decision. This first commandment is the pre-condition for true justice; without a right relationship to God no genuine justice is possible. – We cannot know the interior heart and mind of the rich man, but we can, based on his actions and his own words, see that he certainly broke this first commandment.
 - a. His wealth appears to have been more important than God.
 - b. He was blinded to the teachings of Moses and the Prophets and failed to live according to his faith.
 - c. His blindness and selfishness led him to lack in Love for God and therefore act justly toward his neighbor.
2. **Guilty** - You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain: Judaism considers caring for the poor an act of justice and righteousness (*tzedakah*). A person who ignored the plight of the poor was not living in accordance with the principles of their faith, a hypocrisy viewed as taking God's name in vain. According to the faith of the rich man, he broke this commandment as well.
 - a. He failed to honor God, in fact blaspheming God by his oppression of the poor.
 - b. He had a responsibility / obligation to care for those in need because every person is created "in the image of God".
 - c. He failed to heed the Prophetic warnings that frequently condemned those who neglect the poor and oppressed, warning that their empty worship is meaningless to God.
3. **Guilty adjacent** - Remember to keep holy the LORD’s Day: Jewish tradition teaches that ritual acts, such as going to synagogue, and ethical conduct are inseparable. We don’t have certain knowledge

³ Deuteronomy 6:10-19

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church 2110, 2134

⁵ Deut. 6:5

about whether he attended synagogue, but based on his situation and discussion with Abraham, we can assume he did. But we can't say he broke this one, since, attending synagogue but having no love for the poor would be seen as a hollow observance and a profound moral failing, but not a rejection of worship.

- a. The Talmud goes so far as to say that acts of charity are as important as all the other commandments put together.
- b. Synagogue attendance without ethical behavior is viewed as incomplete worship.
- c. The prophets criticized anyone focused solely on religious ritual while neglecting social justice.

Group 2: Love of Neighbor

1. **Not guilty** - Honor your father and mother:
2. **Guilty / Guilty Adjacent** - You shall not kill (murder): This one is tricky... Strictly speaking, a lack of love for the poor is not the same as actively murdering someone, but indifference and inaction toward the suffering of is a very serious failure.
 - a. The Torah commands, "*You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor*".⁶ The rich man had a duty to intervene since Lazarus' life was in danger by sickness and starvation.
 - b. The Talmud teaches that to save a single human life is to save an entire world and to neglect a life is a grave moral failure. The suffering caused by poverty is a threat to life, and neglecting the poor when one has the ability to help is considered a deeply serious offense.
 - c. A Midrash (rabbinic teaching) says, "A small bit of bread may be life to the poor; one who deprives them of it sheds blood". This text equates withholding sustenance from the poor with an act of bloodshed, conceptually connecting the two issues.
3. **Not guilty** - You shall not commit adultery:
4. **Guilty / Guilty Adjacent** - You shall not steal: While neglecting the poor is not categorized as outright theft in the same way as physically taking someone's belongings, it is considered a serious ethical and spiritual transgression that violates the underlying values of the commandment. It represents a failure to live a life of justice and compassion, which are essential to a Jewish understanding of a life lived in accordance with God's law.
 - a. He hoarded resources while others were in need, which is a form of social and spiritual gluttony. It is seen as "stealing" from the community by depriving others of their basic needs.
 - b. He failed to give charitably. Neglecting this obligation is a violation of a positive commandment and a failure to provide what is due to the poor.
5. **Not guilty** - You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
6. **Not guilty** - You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
7. **Not guilty** - You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

As we can see, their guilt wasn't merely insensitivity, it wasn't due to inconsequential oversight, and it wasn't just a matter of not doing what they ought to have done. The rich man for example, could have seen to it that the poor man had enough to eat, and he might even have gone further and 'donated' medical treatment. He failed to do those things, but more important is the cause of his failure. He was guilty of breaking the most important first commandment, and the second, which led to being guilty or guilty adjacent to breaking 3 other commandments. Put in a Catholic context, we can see that the rich man died in a state of mortal sin which was made apparent by reflecting on his attachment to wealth and his treatment of Lazarus. According to his faith, he neither loved God nor his neighbor, he failed to acknowledge the dignity and value of the human person and therefore did not act in accord with building an authentic human society, he failed to understand authentic worship: therefore, he failed to be just.

⁶ Leviticus 19:16

The Judeans of the Southern Kingdom to whom Amos was speaking, they were also guilty of being selfishly neglectful of their responsibility / moral obligation to alleviate poverty and suffering in the whole of Israel (north and south). The whole of Israel was bonded in covenant, spiritual bound together. During the life of Amos, they were experiencing a period of prosperity and peace. But instead of thanking God for it and using it to plan for the future and help the less fortunate, the leaders in Jerusalem threw themselves into a lifestyle of indulgence and luxury. They ignored their responsibilities towards God and their neighbors, especially towards the less fortunate, and spent all their time partying! Amos warned them and they laughed at him. No one listened. The times were so good that everyone thought they would last forever. Just like the rich man in the parable, their worldly success had blinded them to the true meaning of life, as well as to the simple fact that no one lives forever.

As we earlier noted from the second reading, St. Paul encourages us to keep our sights set on Heaven. That we are to lean into / hold fast to our baptismal confession, hold to THE commandment. How many times during this past week did you think about heaven? If we were on a family vacation, traveling to some beautiful mountain resort, or to the Grand Canyon, wouldn't it be strange if we never spoke or thought about where we were going while we were on our way? And yet, often that's exactly what we do in relation to heaven. And that's extremely dangerous, because it makes us vulnerable to temptations. We more easily turn off the right road when we see an attractive billboard if we aren't thinking about our destination.

This is very much the context of St Paul's advice to the young bishop, Timothy. Paul has just warned him about the dangers of money. In fact, the previous verses contain that famous phrase: *"The desire for money is the root of all evil."* The desire for money can distract us from our destination. Money is a means for achieving worldly success, stability, and pleasure. But all those things will pass away. And so, St Paul exhorts us to keep our sights set on heaven, to always keep our destination in mind, to *"compete well for the faith"* and *"to keep the commandment without stain or reproach"* until Christ comes again. If we are like the rich man in today's Gospel passage instead of following St. Paul's advice, we will be looking down the barrel of dying in a state of mortal sin.

The heart of this parable lies in its closing words, when Abraham tells the rich man, now suffering in Hades, that even if someone rises from the dead, those who refuse to listen to Moses and the prophets will not be convinced. We can pause just for a moment and recognize that Jesus himself is the one speaking, and Jesus knows that, despite his suffering and death out of love for us, the miracle of his Resurrection will still not convince many people. His words should pierce our hearts because they reveal a truth about our weak and fickle human nature: even when we know, deep down, that God's Word is true, that Christ is Lord and Savior, we often resist believing. As Catholics, we believe the Resurrection itself is the ultimate miracle, and we profess it every Sunday in the Creed. But perhaps we dismiss it often in more subtle ways.

Here are three of those ways. We Worship Other Gods for Convenience. Even though we know Jesus is Lord, and we say with our lips that we worship him, we don't worship him with our actions. We're drawn to other "gods" because they're easier to follow. The rich man in the parable worshipped wealth, feasting sumptuously, and comfort. Deep in our hearts, we know the Bible calls us to love God above all, but the gods of this world—money, fame, comfort—promise instant gratification without the cross. As Catholics, we're called to worship the one true God, who asks for our whole heart.

The Catechism reminds us that idolatry isn't just about statues; it's about anything we place above God.⁷ Yet we resist belief because it demands change. We're afraid that following Christ fully will cramp our style. We thus settle for the middle ground. We think we can be just good enough to get to heaven, but not so holy that we miss out on all the "fun". Rather, we should embrace change and discomfort if it means

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church 2113

following the Gospel more closely. Whether it's forgiving someone, controlling our desires, or serving the poor, belief isn't just a personal and private matter. Deep in our hearts, we sense this, but we make excuses: "I'm too busy," "I'm not ready," or "I'll do it later."

We let the world's narrative drown out God's truth. The rich man's brothers were surrounded by a culture that valued wealth and status, blinding them to the poor at their gates. Today, secular culture bombards us with messages that faith is outdated or irrational, that spiritual realities won't make us happy. We hear voices saying, "You don't need religion to be good." Deep down, we know Christ's truth transcends these objections, but it's easier to go along with the crowd than to hold firm to the Faith.

Jesus has been risen from the dead for more than 2,000 years, and how many of us have taken in the message of the Gospel about wealth and poverty? Not all of us have been as successful, in the worldly sense, as the rich man in the parable. But all of us are constantly being tempted to think that that kind of success is what life is really about, which can be just as dangerous.

The 1st and Gospel reading touch upon the innate dignity of every human person, independent of their social, financial, cultural or religious position. Really the entirety of the Gospel of Luke: The Gospel of the Poor or Gospel of Jubilee, reflects the deeply socially just minded faith of the Hebrews which is testified to throughout the Old Testament and shouldn't be reduced to a lighthearted nudge to be nicer to the homeless, poor, or otherwise marginalized person. The message which we have received today through these readings goes much deeper than that, they go to the very heart of what it means to be a person of faith who thinks, speaks, and acts in accord with that faith. We cannot so easily dismiss it.⁸ As it says in *Gaudium et Spes*, "*Wishing to come down to topics that are practical and of some urgency, the Council lays stress on respect for the human person: everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way lest he follow the example of the rich man who ignored Lazarus, the poor man*".⁹

Rooted in the Jewish teachings and tradition, Jesus focuses first on the poor of the household of faith who have a particular claim on our charity, our affection and material resources. We cannot be indifferent / oblivious to the suffering of others in the family of faith, nor of any other human being. St. Augustine, in his work, *De Doctrina Christiana*¹⁰ called this the Christian duty to Universal benevolence, the duty to organize our affairs in a way that actively contributes to the good of humankind at large. Rooted in the tradition of the Churches understanding, he argued, "*further, all men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you.*" Those closest to us are not morally superior to strangers but are necessarily our focal points: "*since you cannot consult for the good of [all people], you must take the matter as decided for you by a sort of lot, according as each man happens for the time being to be more closely connected with you.*" We have limited attention and resources, and we cannot actively serve the good of everyone at the same time and although the theological virtues move us to desire the 'good' for all, we equipped in our humanity to recognize, understand, and prioritize such needs as they exist throughout the world.

These words of Pope Saint John Paul II are a clarion call to all the missionary disciples of Christ. He said,

"We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, the Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors. In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility. Riches and freedom create a special obligation. And so, in the name of the solidarity that

⁸ *Saint Luke's Gospel*, The Navarre Bible (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2005), 144.

⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, 27

¹⁰ *De Doctrina Christiana*, by St. Augustine. Available in translation online at [On Christian Doctrine \(Book II\)](http://On Christian Doctrine (Book II). NewAdvent.org). NewAdvent.org.

binds us all together in a common humanity, I again proclaim the dignity of every human person: the rich man and Lazarus are both human beings, both of them equally created in the image and likeness of God, both of them equally redeemed by Christ, at a great price, the price of the 'precious blood of Christ'."¹¹

Today's Gospel is a stark reminder that our choices have eternal consequences. Jesus reveals to us the importance of our actions, upon what foundations they arise, and the gravity of our sins—failing to act with love and justice when called to do so. To avoid such sins, we must heed Jesus' call to love our God first and because of that love, to love our neighbor, actively seeking to serve those in need, like Lazarus, with compassion and generosity. Through prayer and discernment, we can cultivate hearts attentive to God's prompting, ensuring our faith is alive with action. The freedom with which Christ has set us free¹² encourages us to become the servants of all. Thus, the process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest: *"For where truth and love are missing, the process of liberation results in the death of a freedom which will have lost all support."*¹³

Again, Pope Saint John Paul II warns us,

*"At stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt. As many people are already more or less clearly aware, the present situation does not seem to correspond to this dignity. Every individual is called upon to play his or her part in this peaceful campaign, a campaign to be conducted by peaceful means, in order to secure development in peace, in order to safeguard nature itself and the world about us. The Church too feels profoundly involved in this enterprise, and she hopes for its ultimate success. Consequently, following the example of Pope Paul VI with his Encyclical Populorum Progressio, I wish to appeal with simplicity and humility to everyone, to all men and women without exception. I wish to ask them to be convinced of the seriousness of the present moment and of each one's individual responsibility, and to implement-by the way they live as individuals and as families, by the use of their resources, by their civic activity, by contributing to economic and political decisions and by personal commitment to national and international undertakings-the measures inspired by solidarity and love of preference for the poor. This is what is demanded by the present moment and above all by the very dignity of the human person, the indestructible image of God the Creator, which is identical in each one of us."*¹⁴

Finally, he encourages with these words,

*"thus the Lord unites us with himself through the Eucharist—Sacrament and Sacrifice—and he unites us with himself and with one another by a bond stronger than any natural union; and thus united, he sends us into the whole world to bear witness, through faith and works, to God's love, preparing the coming of his Kingdom and anticipating it, though in the obscurity of the present time. All of us who take part in the Eucharist are called to discover, through this sacrament, the profound meaning of our actions in the world in favor of development and peace; and to receive from it the strength to commit ourselves ever more generously, following the example of Christ, who in this sacrament lays down his life for his friends."*¹⁵ Our personal commitment, like Christ's and in union with his, will not be in vain but certainly fruitful.¹⁶

¹¹ John Paul II, Homily in Yankee Stadium, 2 October 1979

¹² Gal 5:1

¹³ John Paul II, [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987).

¹⁴ John Paul II, [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987).

¹⁵ Jn 15:13

¹⁶ John Paul II, [Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987).

Synthesis of Theological Reflections on Social Justice and Faith

Executive Summary

The homily synthesizes a theological analysis that uses the biblical parable of the rich man and Lazarus as a lens to critique individualistic materialism and a superficial, "comfortable" faith. The central argument posits that true faith necessitates active love, radical solidarity, and a profound sense of social responsibility, particularly toward the poor and marginalized. The text draws a powerful parallel between the parable's themes and the modern concept of the American Dream, arguing that when pursued with an individualistic mindset, it devolves into an "American Nightmare" of oppression and social tribalism. Conversely, when rooted in a communal context and divine truth, it can approximate a "Universal Call to Holiness."

A detailed examination of the rich man's actions through the Ten Commandments concludes that his failure was not mere indifference but a state of mortal sin, stemming from a primary violation of the first commandment—placing wealth before God. This initial failure cascaded into violations against both God and neighbor, including blasphemy through hypocrisy, and a moral culpability adjacent to killing and stealing by neglecting the life-threatening poverty at his gate. The document concludes with a call to an authentic faith that recognizes the eternal consequences of earthly actions, combats the allure of worldly "gods" like wealth and comfort, and actively works for justice and development, fulfilling the Christian duty of universal benevolence.

1. The Central Parable and Its Modern Analogue

The analysis is built around the Gospel parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which is presented not merely as a call to be "nice to the poor," but as a profound commentary on the nature of faith, sin, and eternal judgment. This biblical narrative is juxtaposed with the secular ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the American Dream to challenge contemporary mindsets.

The Rich Man, Lazarus, and the Nature of Sin

The core of the parable concerns a wealthy man who lives in luxury and a beggar named Lazarus who suffers at his gate. Upon their deaths, their fates are reversed. The document stresses that the rich man is condemned not for possessing wealth, which is seen as a potential good from God, but for his complete failure to acknowledge and act upon the suffering at his doorstep. This inaction is portrayed as a symptom of a deeper spiritual illness.

- **Failure of Faith:** The rich man's indifference reveals that he was "blinded to the teachings of Moses and the Prophets" and failed to live according to his faith. His wealth had become his god.
- **A State of Mortal Sin:** His condition is framed in a Catholic context as dying in a state of mortal sin. This state is made apparent by his attachment to wealth and his treatment of Lazarus, which demonstrates a failure to love God and, consequently, a failure to love his neighbor.
- **Eternal Consequences:** The parable's conclusion, where Abraham denies the rich man's request to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, underscores a critical truth: "even if someone rises from the dead, those who refuse to listen to Moses and the prophets will not be convinced." This is directly linked to the Resurrection of Jesus, suggesting that even this ultimate miracle is resisted by those whose hearts are hardened by worldly attachments.

The American Dream as a Double-Edged Sword

The text uses the American Dream and the ideals of the Declaration of Independence as a modern cultural framework to explore the same themes of individualism versus communal responsibility.

- **The Communal Ideal:** At its best, when "conceived of in a communal context," the American Dream can inspire people to strive for an ideal that "approximates the Universal Call to Holiness." In this optimistic view, the rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" are understood as unalienable rights endowed by a Creator, fostering a just society where individuals contribute to the good of all.
- **The Individualistic Corruption:** When these ideals are interpreted through an "individualistic mindset," the natural hope they inspire becomes an "unrealistic opiate for the masses." This leads to a culture that prizes ambition and achievement over the love of God and neighbor, resulting in:
 - The oppression of the many by the few.
 - The creation of "culture wars, social and political tribalism."
 - An assertion of "MY rights over the rights of others."

- The transformation of the American Dream into an "American Nightmare" for those left behind in poverty and suffering.

2. A Theological Analysis of Guilt: The Ten Commandments

The document presents a detailed forensic analysis of the rich man's guilt by examining his actions against the Ten Commandments, which are divided into duties concerning the love of God and the love of neighbor. This framework demonstrates that his neglect of Lazarus was not a minor oversight but a profound violation of divine law.

Violations Against the Love of God (Commandments 1-3)

The rich man's primary failure is a disordered relationship with God, which is the root cause of his failure to act justly toward his neighbor.

Commandment	Verdict	Justification
1. You shall not have strange gods before me.	Guilty	This is the foundational sin. His wealth appears to have been more important than God, serving as an idol that blinded him to the teachings of his faith. Without a right relationship to God, "no genuine justice is possible."
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Guilty	In Judaism, caring for the poor is an act of justice (<i>tzedakah</i>). By ignoring the plight of Lazarus, the rich man lived a life of hypocrisy, which is viewed as taking God's name in vain. He failed to honor God by oppressing a person created "in the image of God."
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD's Day.	Guilty Adjacent	While it is unknown if he attended synagogue, the text argues that ritual acts and ethical conduct are inseparable. Attending synagogue while having no love for the poor would be a "hollow observance and a profound moral failing," as prophets criticized those focused on ritual while neglecting social justice.

Violations Against the Love of Neighbor (Commandments 5 & 7)

The failure to love God manifests directly in a failure to love one's neighbor, leading to moral culpability for serious offenses.

Commandment	Verdict	Justification
5. You shall not kill.	Guilty / Guilty Adjacent	While not an active murder, his inaction and indifference toward Lazarus's life-threatening suffering are a grave failure. The text cites the Torah ("You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor") and a Midrash ("one who deprives [the poor] of it sheds blood") to equate withholding sustenance with an act of bloodshed.
7. You shall not steal.	Guilty / Guilty Adjacent	Hoarding resources while others are in need is described as "social and spiritual gluttony." This is seen as "stealing" from the community by depriving others of their basic needs. His failure to give charitably is a failure to provide what is due to the poor.

3. Critique of Individualistic and "Comfortable" Faith

The document extends its critique from the rich man to a contemporary "comfortable Christian disposition" that is individualistic, self-centered, and avoids the radical demands of the Gospel.

The "Reasonably Good Person"

This mindset focuses on personal salvation achieved by avoiding overt, unrestrained passions, allowing one to feel superior to "those people." It fosters a comfortable accountability that avoids deep examination of personal sin and its social consequences. This disposition results in self-serving logic like, "sure I cheat on my taxes... it's MY MONEY, I earned it," and token gestures of charity, such as putting "a few bucks in that red kettle at Christmas time."

Subtle Forms of Resisting Belief

Drawing from the parable's conclusion about disbelief in the resurrection, the text identifies three modern ways people resist the fullness of faith:

1. **Worshipping Other Gods for Convenience:** People are drawn to the "gods of this world—money, fame, comfort" because they promise instant gratification without the cross. This is a form of idolatry where something other than God is placed at the center of one's life.
2. **Avoiding Personal Change:** True belief demands change and discomfort. People resist because they are "afraid that following Christ fully will cramp our style," so they settle for a middle ground of being "just good enough to get to heaven, but not so holy that we miss out on all the 'fun'."
3. **Letting Secular Narratives Dominate:** Secular culture "bombards us with messages that faith is outdated or irrational." It is often easier to go along with the crowd's narrative than to hold firm to the Faith in the face of these pressures.

Historical and Scriptural Warnings

The analysis reinforces this critique with other scriptural examples:

- **The Prophet Amos:** The leaders of Jerusalem during a time of prosperity are presented as a historical parallel. They indulged in a lifestyle of luxury and "spent all their time partying," ignoring their responsibilities and the "collapse of Joseph" (the suffering of Israel).
- **St. Paul's Advice to Timothy:** Paul warns against the "desire for money," which he calls "the root of all evil," because it distracts from the ultimate destination of heaven. He exhorts believers to "compete well for the faith" and keep their sights set on eternal life.

4. The Call to Authentic Faith and Social Responsibility

In response to the critique of a hollowed-out faith, the document outlines a vision of authentic Christianity rooted in social justice, solidarity, and active love, drawing on Church tradition and papal teachings.

The Dignity of the Human Person

The Gospel message is framed as being far deeper than a "lighthearted nudge to be nicer." It goes to the "very heart of what it means to be a person of faith" by stressing the innate dignity of every human person, independent of their social or financial status. Citing *Gaudium et Spes*, the text states, "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way."

Universal Benevolence and Practical Application

The concept of the Christian duty to "Universal Benevolence," as articulated by **St. Augustine**, is introduced. This is the duty to organize one's life to actively contribute to the good of humankind.

- **Principle:** All people are to be loved equally.
- **Practicality:** Since one "cannot do good to all," special regard must be paid to those brought into closer connection by "the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance." Our limited resources and attention mean we must prioritize the needs we can see and address.

A Clarion Call for Solidarity

The document concludes by amplifying its message with powerful quotes from **Pope Saint John Paul II**, presenting his words as a "clarion call to all the missionary disciples of Christ."

- **Special Responsibility:** "We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, the Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors. In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility."
- **The Foundation of Liberation:** True development and liberation take shape in the exercise of solidarity, which is "the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest." Without truth and love, "the process of liberation results in the death of a freedom which will have lost all support."
- **The Role of the Eucharist:** Participation in the Eucharist calls believers "to discover... the profound meaning of our actions in the world in favor of development and peace; and to receive from it the strength to commit ourselves ever more generously." This personal commitment, united with Christ's, is promised to be "not in vain but certainly fruitful."

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
American Dream	The cultural ethos and ideal that anyone with a good work ethic can realize their aspirations, improve their socio-economic status, and contribute to the good of all. The source posits it is only achievable justly when conceived in a communal, not individualistic, context.
American Nightmare	The state of suffering, sickness, and poverty experienced by many who, despite their efforts, are left behind by a system where the American Dream has become an "impossible" ideal due to individualism.
Catechism of the Catholic Church	A source cited to explain that the first commandment is the foundation of moral life and that idolatry consists of placing anything—such as wealth or comfort—above God.
Culture of Death	A societal condition resulting from original sin and a secular mindset that prizes ambition and individual achievement over the love of God and neighbor.
De Doctrina Christiana	A work by St. Augustine referenced in the text that outlines the Christian duty of "Universal benevolence."
Gaudium et Spes	A Vatican II document cited to emphasize the principle of respect for the human person, stating that everyone should view their neighbor as "another self" and ensure they have the means for a dignified life.
Great Commandment	The core Jewish teaching from Deuteronomy to "love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength." St. Paul's reference to "the commandment" is understood to encompass this whole.
Mortal Sin	A grave spiritual state that severs one's relationship with God. The text suggests the rich man died in this state, which was made apparent by his attachment to wealth and his unjust treatment of Lazarus.
Midrash	A form of rabbinic teaching cited to illustrate a deeper moral truth; specifically, that "one who deprives [the poor] of it [bread] sheds blood," conceptually connecting the failure to provide aid with the act of killing.
Solidarity	The principle of love and service of one's neighbor, especially the poorest. The text identifies it as the concrete expression of development and liberation.
Sollicitudo Rei Socialis	An encyclical by Pope Saint John Paul II quoted multiple times to emphasize the dignity of the human person, the responsibility that comes with wealth, and the call for a personal commitment to the poor.
Talmud	A body of Jewish teaching cited to support the idea that acts of charity are as important as all other commandments combined and that to save a single human life is to save an entire world.
Tzedakah	The Jewish concept of caring for the poor, which is considered an act of justice and righteousness, not simply optional charity.
Universal Benevolence	St. Augustine's term for the Christian duty to organize one's affairs to actively contribute to the good of all humankind, with a practical focus on those whom circumstances place closest to us.
Universal Call to Holiness	The call for all Christians to strive for an uncompromised and sanctified life. The text suggests the American Dream, if properly conceived, could approximate this ideal in a secular context.